



## **FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO VACANT AND IDLE HOUSES PHENOMENON IN RURAL AREA FROM THE VILLAGE HEADS' PERSPECTIVE. CASE STUDY: SERI MENANTI, KUALA PILAH**

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### **Abstract:**

Rapid urbanization process has had an impact on the rural population thus to its settlements. Rural depopulation and idle houses are among the effects that occur; disrupting the sustainability of rural settlements. If this situation continues, it will eventually lead to 'hollow village' phenomenon as happened for example in China and Japan. Previous studies conducted in other countries found that this phenomenon was due to the migration of people from rural to urban areas in their search for opportunities as well as for better housings offered in urban areas. However, very little understanding has been offered by the current literature about the vacant and idle houses phenomenon in Malaysia. Therefore, this paper intends to examine the factors that have led to this phenomenon, based on the observation and the knowledge of the village heads in Seri Menanti, District of Kuala Pilah, Negeri Sembilan. Interviews were conducted with 12 village heads selected from the case study area and the collected data were then analysed using descriptive and thematic methods. This study found that there are five major causes that contributing to the emergence of vacant and idle houses in the case study area namely: the economic factors particularly due to the various attractions of the urban areas; social factors such as deaths of both parents; and youth migration; policy factor particularly due to restrictions imposed by the authorities; lack of basic facilities – especially technology and infrastructure; and environment factor that refers to lifestyle. Each factor has its own characteristics that describe the factors themselves. Thus, further study is necessary to improve the solutions of rural decline and to suggest viable recommendations so that vacant and idle houses can be transformed into beneficial solutions towards meeting the current needs of the population.

**Keywords:**

Factor, Vacant, Idle, House, Village Head

**Introduction**

Rural-urban migration flows are a global issue that affects people all over the world, reshaping cultures of different intensities and shapes based on local conditions. The key drivers of this migration are the pursuit of economic growth, which is fueled by a broader variety of job opportunities in urban areas, as well as significantly higher revenues (Semprebon *et al.*, 2019). The inadequacy of rural housing, combined with insufficient and declining rural facilities (Dunn *et al.*, 1981), resulted in a major drive towards emigration, while the perceived attractions of the cities exerted a strong pull (Weekley *et al.*, 1988). In other words, rural-urban migration is emphasized as a continuous process that occurs at various levels of complexity in most countries (Akin L. Mabogunje, 1970).

Rural decline is an inevitable phenomenon as human society transforms from agriculture to urban-industrial and knowledge-based economies (Li *et al.*, 2019). Today, rural decline is an undisputed reality and has become a worldwide concern as the world continues to encourage urbanization and industrial growth (Liu and Li, 2017). Countries like the United States (UK), Canada, Sweden, Australia, China and Japan have either experienced rural decline (Markey *et al.*, 2008; Wood, 2008; Luck *et al.*, 2011; Hedlund and Lundholm, 2015; Li *et al.*, 2018). Rural decline in physically refers to the neglect and vacancy houses, both which can lead damage and will resulted the emergence of rural hollowing phenomenon commonly found in rapidly industrializing countries all over the word (Gracia and Ayuga, 2007; White *et al.*, 2009).

So, this research is aimed at discovering the factors that are closely related to the emergence of vacant and idle houses in Malaysia, before this situation becoming more serious and will resulted the emergence of rural hollowing phenomenon like other countries; that commonly is much more pronounced and widespread in China than elsewhere. This research was conducted by the authors in District of Kuala Pilah, Negeri Sembilan. Based on the results of a preliminary study, Seri Menanti is one of the areas where the phenomenon of vacant and idle houses can be found. This selection was taken based on a snowball sampling interview to the right person in control of this phenomenon. As a result of this, 12-village heads<sup>1</sup> were interviewed to learn about their perspectives on how the issue of vacant and idle houses arises in their villages.

**Vacant And Idle House**

In each country, the definition and investigative scope of vacant and idle houses vary and the results indicate their standard of use.

Based on Gu and Asami (2016), vacant houses are residential houses without residences, including rental houses, sale houses, second dwellings, and others like abandoned houses. Nam *et al.*, (2016) have also pointed that Korean law defines, vacant house as having empty since its residents moved to another region, and the house subsequently not being used for an extended period of time. Meanwhile, Rutherford and Springer (2005) found that a vacancy can be defined as a house where the owner who intends to sell the house or the investor who owns the house without a tenant has moved.

<sup>1</sup> The term use in this paper of 'village heads' were reflected to the MPKK (*Majlis Pengurusan Komuniti Kampung*) of each *Kampung Induk*.  
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Crowe and Engagers (2019) also describe vacant as unused for the purposes for which it is held; considered as suitable for development; must have had previous development or preparatory work in anticipation of potential development; situated within the context of a settlement as specified by the local authority. Zulkifli (2011) stated in a study conducted in the United Kingdom, a house is considered vacant when the house has been uninhabited for a period of six months and more. In the US, the United States Census Bureau (1993) defines vacant house as a unit of house that has no inhabitants at the time of the study unless its occupants are at home for a short and temporary period of time. The Bureau also suggests that vacant homes may often consist of homes owned by individuals who have more than one home where the homeowner prefers to reside in another home.

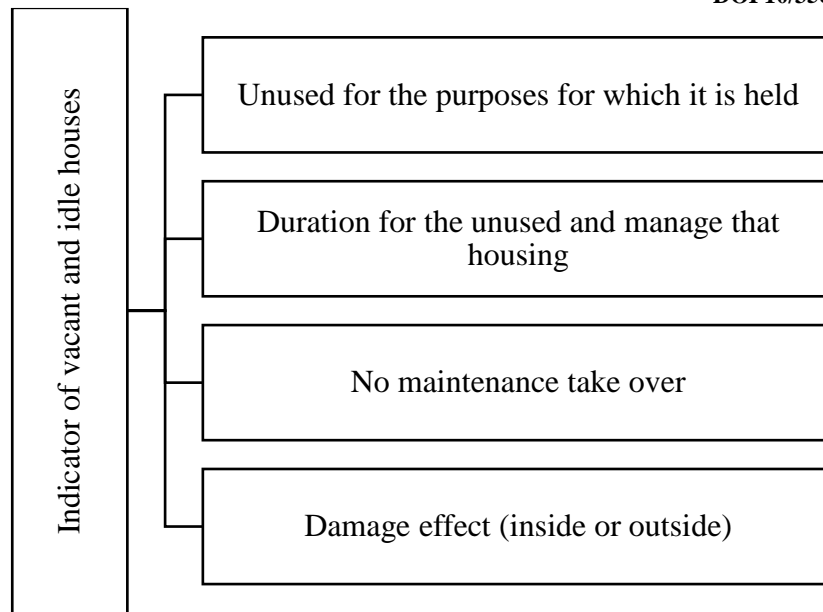
According to Liu *et al.*, (2010), the house is left empty by the occupants when they are offered to serve in urban areas for a long time. Thus, there are two vacant housing situations (Li, 2014):

- (i) The acquisition of agricultural land in rural areas caused the villagers to lose land, so they decided to migrate which eventually increased the vacant houses in the village;
- (ii) The villagers who have good economic condition build new houses in the vicinity causing the old houses to be abandoned and increase the vacancy.

In conclusion, a clear definition that can be used in translating a vacant house in this article is a unit of the house that is no longer inhabited for a certain period of time; and the vacancy rate determines the number of vacant and unsold houses out of the total number of houses. The house can be considered vacant either because the owner of the house has another residence or the house is in the process of sale or rental.

In addition of being called “vacant”, they may be labelled with such negative terms as “abandoned”, “blighted”, “derelict” or “idle” (Cohen, 2001; Eisenberg, 2018; Loures and Vaz, 2018; Zhang, 2018; Abdullah *et al.*, 2019; Liu *et al.*, 2020). Strictly speaking, however for whatever reason a vacant property implies any property that is not currently occupied. Thus, it is important to distinguish between all vacant properties and those that are a problem. Problematic properties are often referred to as “abandoned” or “idle”, meaning that the owners have left and allowed them to fall into disrepair (Li, 2014; Eisenberg, 2018). If an owner is not maintaining her property but continues to pay taxes on it, is it truly abandoned? Some property laws might consider it such, but not all. More specifically, abandonment may take two forms: literal abandonment, where the owner might be present nominally, but has ceased to maintain the property and has allowed it to deteriorate or become a hazard (Li, 2014).

The term “idle building” connotes an image of a building that is unoccupied and in a state of grave disrepair, perhaps boarded up, strewn with trash, and scrawled with graffiti. The vacancy of a residential house refers to the condition of the unoccupied house, while the neglect of the house when maintenance activities are not carried out on the house either periodically or daily. Neglecting the physical condition of this house will make the house unsafe to live in again. **Figure 1** shows the best indicator of the vacant and idle houses definition.

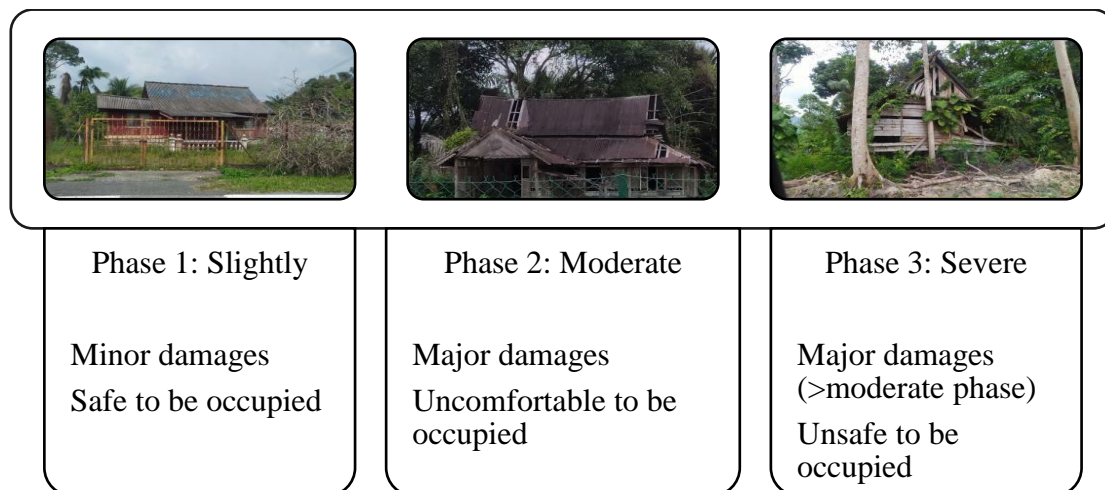


**Figure 1: Indicator of Vacant and Idle Houses**

Figure above shows the relation between each indicator in order to classify the right definition for the phenomenon of vacant and idle house. The level of damage will be mentioned in the next sub-topic as in Figure 2.

**Level of Damage**

Outward migration of the rural population has resulted in many vacant/abandoned houses. Although vacant and idle houses are symptomatic of other problems, they also contribute to neighborhood decline and frustrate revitalization. Also, the physical conditions of destruction will give an impact on environmental pollution. According to Liu *et al.*, (2010), the level of damage ranging from slight, moderate to severe. Figure 2 indicates the level of damage houses.



**Figure 2: Level of Damage Houses<sup>2</sup>**

Source: (PLANMalaysia, 2016)

<sup>2</sup> The picture taken during preliminary survey (study area).

The level of damages that have been classified by PLANMalaysia (2016), shows that the vacant and idle houses differ by their physical condition and based on vacancy period, as well as on how long they have not been maintained.

### ***Theoretical Background of Pull & Push Factor in Rural and Urban Area***

Recently, the emergence of vacant and idle houses phenomenon was one of the challengers to continuing rural population with significant changes in demographic structures, employment opportunities, community organization, lifestyles and standards of living, accessibility and rural culture (Mukherjee and Zhang, 2007; Goodman, 2008; Long *et al.*, 2010). Many of the vacant and idle houses in rural areas comes from cases of rural-urban migration due to urbanization process. These may include the owner who died or moved to better area especially to urban area. Basically, depopulation refers to very closely related to the outflow of rural individuals to urban areas especially young people who want to find better job opportunities in urban areas (Muilu and Rusanen, 2003; Amcoff and Westholm, 2007; Luck *et al.*, 2011; Afroditi Manakou, 2018).

However, based on the System Theory, there are two forces that give meaning to every decision made whether to stay or migrate (Akin L. Mabogunje, 1970). Due to poor living conditions and few job opportunities in rural areas, a vast number of farmers, especially young ones, make their living in big cities. At the end, this situation has contributed to the emergence of rural hollowing phenomenon (Liu *et al.*, 2010; Sun *et al.*, 2011; Li, 2014; Thorbeck *et al.*, 2014; Eisenberg, 2018).

### **Methodology**

The study was conducted in the State of Negeri Sembilan using the qualitative phenomenological approach to address the issues raised in the study. According to Creswell (2013), qualitative methods can help researchers to obtain more accurate data, and help researchers to understand a phenomenon that occur in real context.

The research paradigm method was exploratory which is this research want to investigate the phenomena happen in rural area and to identify/discover important variables (which means the factor of emergence vacant and idle houses). The research questions in this article are list as below:

- (i) What is happening in rural houses?
- (ii) What are the salient themes or categories of the emergence vacant and idle houses factor, from village head's perspective?
- (iii) How are these categories (factors) linked with one another?

Thus, an exploratory research design was adopted in this research. Therefore, in-depth interviews have been done with 12 village heads regarding their powers in monitoring to combat rural areas. Data collected was analysed using the descriptive and thematic research method.

The case study has taken place in Mukim Seri Menanti, District Kuala Pilah, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia (Figure 3). Negeri Sembilan is a state in Malaysia situated in the central region of Peninsular Malaysia with an area of 665 374.77 hectares.



**Figure 3: Study Area in Selected Mukim Seri Menanti, District of Kuala Pilah**

Seri Menanti is a town, a mukim and a state assembly constituency in Kuala Pilah District in central Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia.

#### *A Selection Of Informants*

Our research is aimed at discovering the factors that are closely related to the vacant and idle houses. Data collected in this study consists of primary data acquired from interviews, and observations. To identify potential informants, a preliminary survey was done. A snow ball sampling was done by clustering the areas. The following procedure was used to select the clusters of informants:

- (i) A preliminary survey found that there were two clusters in the case study area. There were traditional village and aboriginal village. From this arrangement, traditional village clusters of Kuala Pilah District were selected;
- (ii) From the preliminary survey, it is shown that, Seri Menanti is experiencing vacant and idle houses phenomenon. This selection was based on the interview through snow ball sampling to get the right person in charge of this situation;
- (iii) From this result, 12-village heads identified to be interviewed, to know their perception on how the emergence of vacant and idle houses phenomenon happen in their village.

The researcher explores a few general topics to help uncover the participant's meaning perspective, but otherwise respects how the participant frames and structures the responses. This, in fact is an assumption fundamental to qualitative research – the participant's perspective on the phenomenon of interest should unfold as the participant views it, not as the researcher views it.

Analysis was based largely on the perceptions of the 12-village heads in Seri Menanti; involving 12 villages namely Kampung Bukit Perah, Kampung Gamin, Kampung Tengah,

Kampung Tengah Ulu, Kampung Seri Menanti, Kampung Buyau/Tanah Datar, Kampung Merual, Kampung Pulau, Kampung Mertang, Kampung Sikai, Kampung Gunong Pasir and Kampung Tanjung Ipoh.

### Result and Discussion

The interview was patterned to facilitate data collection and capture the views of different village heads. Data collected was analyzed using the descriptive (Table 1) and thematic (Table 2) research method.

Table 1 shows the number of houses occupied in 2017 and 2019 at the respective villages as data obtained from KEMAS and village heads during the preliminary study.

**Table 1: Number of Houses at 12 villages in 2017 and 2019**

	Number of Houses Occupied	
	2017	2019
<b>Kampung Bukit Perah</b> Kampung Sawah Liat, Kampung Bukit Perah Ulu, Kampung Bukit Perah Hilir, Kampung Perigi Jernih, Kampung Bukit Perah Seberang	159 units	125 units
<b>Kampung Gamin</b> Kampung Gamin, Kampung Gamin Tengah, Kampung Gamin Ulu, Kampung Gamin Hilir, Kampung Gamin Solok	208 units	84 units
<b>Kampung Tengah</b> Kampung Tengah, Kampung Kubang Gajah, Kampung Pulau, Kampung Panglang Hilir	106 units	106 units
<b>Kampung Tengah Ulu</b> Kampung Tengah Ulu, Kampung Ampang Batu, Kampung Palang	103 units	*not update
<b>Kampung Seri Menanti</b> Kampung Juar, Kampung Seri Menanti, Kampung Baru Seri Menanti, Kampung Bukit, Kampung Tanjung Bacang, Kg Tanjung Beringin,	260 units	142 units
<b>Kampung Buyau</b> Kampung Buyau Kanan, Kampung Buyau Kiri, Kampung Bukit Tempurung, Kampung Tanah Datar, Kampung Masjid Terbakar, Kampung Buyau, Kampung Batu Hampar	311 units	*not update
<b>Kampung Merual</b> Kampung Merual, Kampung Sungai Layang, Kampung Umor, Kampung Padang Biawas	74 units	74 units
<b>Kampung Pulau</b> Kampung Pulau, Kampung Bukit Lintang, Kampung Tanjung Sepam, Kampung Lereng, Kampung Galau	36 units	48 units
<b>Kampung Mertang</b> Kampung Mertang, Kampung Mertang Seberang, Kampung Lereng, Kampung Tanjung Galau	201 units	48 units
<b>Kampung Sikai</b> Kampung Sikai, Kampung Tanjung Limau, Kampung Sungai	92 units	35 units

Lepok		
<b>Kampung Gunong Pasir</b> Kampung Gunong Pasir, Kg Simpai, Kg Paya Kumbah, Kg Tanjung Juan, Kg Kubur, Kg Seri Lemak, Kg Bukit, Kg Sekolah	250 units	110 units
<b>Kampung Tanjung Ipoh</b> Kampung Tanjung Ipoh, Kampung Ampang Serong, Kampung Gementir Hilir	170 units	*not update

Table 1 shows that most of the total number of occupied houses are decreasing due to increasing number of vacant houses.

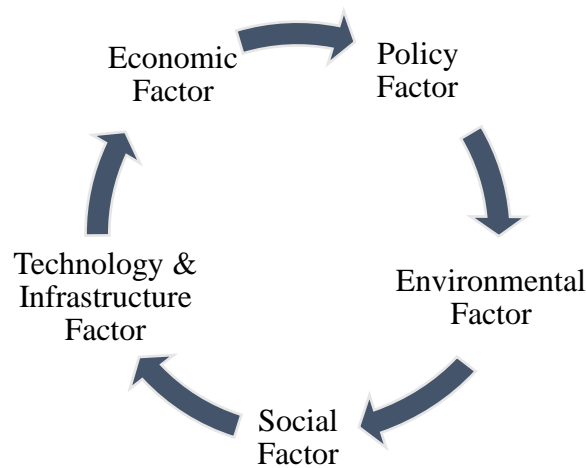
Next, the head of villagers who were interviewed (to answer the factor of the emergence vacant and idle houses) identified five factors that have caused the increase of vacant housing in Seri Menanti (Table 2).

**Table 2: Factor That Led to The Emergence of Vacant and Idle Houses**  
**Factors**

<p><b>1. Economic Factor</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low incomes</li> <li>• Less job opportunities</li> <li>• Low living standard</li> <li>• Only small-scale manufacturing</li> </ul>
<p><b>2. Social Factor</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Youth migration <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Received an offer to further studies</li> <li>▪ Job conditions</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Deaths of both parents</li> <li>• Customary land</li> </ul>
<p><b>3. Policy Factor</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Customary Tenure Enactment (Customary land law in Adat Perpatih) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Limited landowner power</li> <li>▪ Restrictions on the importance of property rights only to women</li> <li>▪ Encourage the younger generation especially men to travel</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><b>4. Technology &amp; Infrastructure Factor</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low accessibility</li> <li>• Inadequate access</li> <li>• Lack of basic facilities</li> <li>• Lack of social facilities</li> <li>• Lack of public facilities</li> </ul>
<p><b>5. Environment Factor</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lifestyle</li> <li>• Land not economic to develop</li> <li>• Natural disaster</li> </ul>



The push factor from rural area itself, will result to migration of rural people to urban area. The low incomes, lack of job opportunities (whereby, there are only small-scale manufacturing industries in the rural areas) and low living standard, are the reason why they migrate especially for young generation, while the old one remains in the rural area. Other than that, most of the young generation will migrate to urban area, when they get offer to further their studies or get a better job offer in the cities. Apart from that, Customary Tenure Enactment (Customary Land Law in Adat Perpatih), also one of the factors, whereby it was said to have given the landowner power limited only to women. Having less power on land ownership thus encourages men to move to urban areas. For the technology and infrastructure factor, the lacking of facilities like public, social, and also basic facilities are also the reason why they choose to migrate to the urban area, which is offers much enough facilities. Next for the last factors of environment itself being a push factor from rural area; like the lifestyle.



**Figure 4: Main Factors of the Emergence of Vacant and Idle Houses Phenomenon**

The five factors shown in Figure 4 were identified to be the main factors that contributing to the emergence of vacant and idle houses phenomenon, based on the perspective of the interviewed village heads. It also shows that, is the factors were connected to one another, and will give a big negative or positive impact to that area, depends on how each factor contributes negatively and positively to the development.

### Conclusion

This paper has investigated the factors of vacant and idle houses emergence and attempted to provide some answers to the question of why some rural areas decline. Actually, each of these factors that have been discussed in this paper, depends on the study area that had been chosen. Each factor has its own characteristics that describe the factors themselves. Thus, further study is necessary to improve the solutions of rural decline and to suggest viable recommendations so that vacant and idle houses can be transformed into beneficial solutions towards meeting the current needs of the population. As a conclusion, the five factors discussed in this paper reflect the country that seems to face the rural hollowing issues like China if left unsolved.

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